



A Poem in Praise of St. Patrick

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CAOIMHÍN Ó DÓNAILL

A poem in praise of St. Patrick

This paper consists of an edition of the poem beginning ‘Pátraicc Macha mártai Gaidil’ and is accompanied by a translation, commentary and notes. It survives in a single manuscript copy RIA B.iv.2, f.143 written between 1627/8 by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh.¹ It has been edited once previously by Kuno Meyer who presented it as ‘an Old-Irish poem on St. Patrick’ (1907a). His edition consists of a semi-diplomatic text without translation or commentary, and a handful of footnotes detailing his emendments to the manuscript readings. J.F. Kenney categorised the poem as one of a number of ‘Minor texts relating to Patrick’ (1929: 348-9).

Date of Authorship

Carney (1982: 178) puts this poem in the same category as *Saltair na Rann* (SR) and gives them both a date of c.870. The dating of SR has, of course, been a matter of some controversy²; however, a late tenth century date (987) of composition is now generally accepted.³ The poem does indeed share many linguistic features with SR, and the linguistic analysis below will demonstrate the overall Middle Irish character of the text.

Metre

The metre is *lethdechnad*, as Murphy (1961: 51) describes it: ‘with the eight-syllabled line preceding the four syllabled line ... (8² 4² 8² 4²) this metre (without consonance) is called *snédbairdne*...and (with complete consonance) *lethdechnad*.’

¹ Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy, Vol. 5 (1940), 3021-9. I am grateful to the Library of the Royal Irish Academy for allowing me to consult the manuscript.

² see Mac Eoin, 1961; Carney, 1982: 184-8, 207-16.

³ see Breatnach, 1994: 223-224.

Ornamentation is quite regular throughout with perfect end-rhyme (*comardadh*) between b and d in almost every stanza (except 11, long vowel/short vowel in final syllable), consonance (*úaitne*) between b, c and d in every verse, internal rhyme in the second couplet in every verse (except 6). There is alliteration (*úaim*) in at least one line in every verse, connecting alliteration between a and b in every verse except 4, 5 and 8, and alliteration between verses (*fidrad freccomail*) connecting every verse with the next except 12 and 13. The syllable count is consistent throughout. Stanza 12 stands out as it has an extra couplet.⁴

Subject Matter

St. Patrick is styled variously in the poem as: Patrick of Armagh (whom the Gaels exalt) (1a); as the judge of the Irish on the day of Judgement (3a); as the distinguished apostle of Ireland (5a); as a brother (in a clerical sense) (5a); as the shining sun of the Gaels (8a); the good saint of the bountiful western world (12a); pre-eminent Patrick (12f) and the good saint of Ireland. He is praised for having cleansed the Irish by his baptism (2a), and for having rescued them from the Devil's house (2c, d).

Regarding his status, we are told that the Lord himself granted him the foundation of the kingdom (4a,b), and that he has both the pledge of every Irishman (4c) and the tribute of every province (5d). We are told that he is the most exalted of saints, next only to the Lord (3c).

The poem documents the high points of his ministry, his ecclesiastical accomplishments are noted and quantified as follows: the length of time he spent preaching, sixty years (1d); the number of priests he ordained, a host (6a); the number of people upon whom he conferred non-specific orders, 3,000 (6d); the number of bishops upon whom he conferred orders, 350 (7c,d); the number of alphabets he wrote, 700 (9a); the number of churches he marked out/established, 700 (9c); the number of dead (in a spiritual sense i.e. pagans) whom he brought back to life, innumerable, but more than a thousand (11).

⁴ While Murphy (*ibid.*: 50) has discussed the variation of couplet quantity in *dechnad* metres, the presence of an extra couplet here is problematic, not least because it upsets the linking alliteration between stanzas 12 and 13 which is otherwise regular throughout the poem. However, while this may suggest either the interpolation of an additional couplet or indeed the omission of a couplet, no clear solution in terms of identifying or postulating an underlying original text presents itself as no emendation by deletion to stanza 12 can restore linking alliteration with 13 and we have no other manuscript witness. As the treatment of the subject matter and the underlying metre is regular in stanzas 12 and 13, the possibility of at least one omitted couplet may be the more likely explanation. The apparent presence of two *dúnta* is likely due to the premature or erroneous addition of *Pā* at the end of the final line in stanza 12.

We are told that his preaching was direct and open (*cen cleth cen coemna* 1c); that his rescuing of the Irish from the Devil's house was performed without proud reproaching (2c); and that his job as judge of the Irish on the day of judgement is not for the faint-hearted (3b).

Parallels with other texts

Much of the detail of this poem is paralleled in earlier Patrician documents: *Muirchú*, *Tírechán*, *Liber Angeli*, the hymns *Génair Pátraic* and *Audite Omnes Amantes* and the *Tripartite Life*. There follows a list of categorised parallels.⁵

The number of years he preached for (1)

Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939: vl. 1.251): ‘.lx. bliadan ic praicept ind Heirind’.

Cf. *Tírechán* (Bieler, 1979: 123.II 2): ‘.taught sixty-one’ (Note also: Notes Supplementary, 165.53); ‘seventy-two years he taught’.

His judging the Irish on the Day of Judgement (3)

Muirchú (Bieler, 1979: 117.II 6): ‘The fourth request: that all the Irish on the day of judgement shall be judged by you (as is said to the apostles: ‘And you shall sit and judge the twelve tribes of Israel’), so that you may judge those whose apostle you have been.’

Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939: ll.279-84): ‘*⁊ luid iar sein hi sliab Hermóin...Ocus durothlaigestar Pátraic tri itgi fair, .i. bith dia deis hi flaith nime, combad é pa breithem do Goí[d]elaib hi llathi bratha...*’

His rescuing of the Irish from the Devil (2)

Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939: ll.307-8): ‘Is éseom dano forúaslaicc gialnad *⁊* moxaine na nGoidel do Demon.’

Audite Omnes Amante (Orchard, 1993: 173): ‘Christ chose him to be His vicar on earth, who frees captives from a twin servitude, many he frees from bondage to men, and countless sets free from the Devil's domain.’

His grants from the Lord and connection with Armagh (4)

Liber Angeli (Bieler, 1979: 185-187): ‘(7) Therefore, a vast *termonn* is being established by the Lord for the city of Armagh, which you have loved more than all the lands of the Irish... (8) And further, the Lord God has given

⁵ For the Latin sources, editors' English translations are given.

all the tribes of the Irish as a *paruchia* to you and to this city, which in Irish is named Ardd Machae'... (13) ... 'Am I not content to be the apostolic teacher and chief leader for all the tribes of the Irish, especially as I retain my own tax rightly to be rendered, and this is given me even by the Most High as a truly fitting due all over the free churches of the provinces, and this right is decreed likewise to all monasteries of cenobites without any doubt in favour of the ruler of Armagh forever?'... (17) ... Now this city has been established by God and by the apostolic man, the holy bishop Patrick. (18) It therefore has precedence, by a certain privilege and by the heavenly authority of the supreme bishop, its founder, over all churches and monasteries of all the Irish.

Tírechán (Bieler, 1979: 139): '(2)...for if an heir of Patrick were to investigate his supremacy he could vindicate for him almost the whole island as his domain, (3) because ... God gave him the whole island with its people through an angel of the Lord'.

Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939: ll. 2764-6): 'Ocus timarnad duit ó Día', ol int aingel, 'masu ed as maith latt, cona bía cuit do nach ailiu i nHére acht duit t'oenur' (2771-3) 'Is dercaige són dano ⁊ dorat Día Héirind huili duit-siu,' ol int aingel, '⁊ nach sóer bías i nHére bid lat-su.' 'Deo gratias,' ol Pátraic.'

His lineage (5)

He is referred to at one point as *mac mec Fotaid* (5c) (although not inflected in the genitive here as in *Génair Pátraic*, see below).

Muirchú (Bieler, 1979: 67): 'Patrick, also named Sochet, a Briton by race, was born in Britain. His father was Cualfarnius, a deacon, the son (as Patrick himself says) of a priest, Potitus.'

The second stanza of the hymn *Génair Pátraic* (*Thes. II*, 307-21) has: 'Succat a ainm i thubrad, cid athair ba fissi, macc Calpuirn, maicc Fótide.'

Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939: ll. 82-3): 'Calpurnd ainm a athar, huasalsacart hé. Fótíd ainm a šenathar.'

The number of bishops and priests he ordained/conferred orders upon (7)

Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939: vl. ll.3103-6): '...íar n-órdned do deichinbair ar dib fichtib ar trib cétaib do epscopaib, ⁊ íar n-órdned do théora míli do šacartaib ocus áes cech uird archena isind éclais.'

Cf. Tírechán (Bieler, 1979: 127.6): ‘(1) Concerning the number of bishops whom he consecrated in Ireland, (that is), 450. ‘As regards priests, we cannot give a number, because he baptised people daily.’

His knowledge of ‘the seven’ (i.e. the Heptateuch) (8)

Tírechán (Bieler, 1979: 157): ‘(7) and he ordained holy Mucneus, brother of Cethiachus, and gave him the seven books of the Law.’

His writing of alphabets (9)

Tírechán (Bieler, 1979: 127.6): ‘(1)...he baptized people daily and read the letters to them and wrote alphabet-tables for them’ (133.13) (1)...and he wrote an alphabet for Cerpanus’ (151.33) ‘(1)...and he found holy Iarnascus under an elm tree with his son Locharnach, and he wrote an alphabet’ (153.37) ‘(3)...Patrick wrote an alphabet on the day Senachus was consecrated.’

Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939: vl. ll.1244-6): ‘Do|cóid Pátraic íar sin i Ciarraige nÁirne, co tarla dó Ernaisc 7 a macc Lóarnach fō bile and, 7 scribais Pátraic abgitir dó’ (also 1269, 2230 etc.).

The ‘perfect arks’ containing relics (10)

Tírechán (Bieler, 1979: 123.II 3): ‘(5)...and he (Sachellus) received from him [Patrick] a portion of the relics of Peter and Paul, Stephen and Lawrence, which are in Armagh.’

Liber Angeli (Bieler, 1979: 187-9): ‘(19) Furthermore, it [Armagh] ought to be venerated in honour of the principal martyrs Peter and Paul, Stephen, Lawrence, and the others. How much more should it be venerated and diligently honoured by all because of the holy admiration for a gift to us, beyond praise above other things, (namely) that in it, by a secret dispensation, is preserved the most holy blood of Jesus Christ the redeemer of the human race in a sacred linen cloth, together with the relics of saints in the southern church, where there rest the bodies of holy men from abroad who had come with Patrick from across the sea, and of other just men!’

His resuscitation of the dead (11)

Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939: ll. 2543): ‘...7 dorodíusaig marbu; (3076) ‘...iar tódíuscud marb.’

Génair Pátraic (*Thes. II*, 316): ‘mairb dosfiusced do bethu.’

Authorship and Context

There is insufficient evidence available to identify the author of our poem, however, apart from the obvious praising of St. Patrick and Armagh the above close parallels with the content of the main Patrician documents suggest that the poem is a product of an environment where matters such as the statistical details of Patrick's accomplishments were discussed and recalled in detail and that its author may have had access to these documents.⁶ If we understand the final couplet *degnoib Érenn is ed légdait, légenn Pátraic* as referring to writings about and/or by Patrick, then it could be taken that the author is advocating this from personal experience. Tomás Ó Fiach has suggested that the *Tripartite Life*, for example, formed the basis of sermons delivered on the feast of the saint (1958: 168).

Most commentators agree that *Tírechán*, *Muirchú*, *Liber Angeli* and the *Tripartite Life* are works of propaganda promoting Armagh and the Uí Néill dynasty.⁷ Hanson (1968: 80) for example, states that:

There can be no doubt that Tírechán had an ideological motive in writing. He was concerned to claim the hegemony of Armagh over all the monasteries of Ireland and his claim ran parallel to the claim of the dynasty of the Uí Néill to provide high-kings (or, to be more accurate, kings of Ireland) who would exercise hegemony over all the Kings of Ireland. He explicitly says at one point that there are those who oppose and dislike the *paruchia Patricii* and are anxious to draw what is Patrick's away from him, but that in fact everything belongs to Patrick, *quia Deus dedit illi totam insulam cum hominibus*. It is likely that Tírechán had in mind those whom Binchy calls the 'Columban federation', the authorities, ecclesiastical and secular, who supported the hegemony of Iona, of Columba and his foundations and successors.'

Tomás Ó Fiaich (1958, 169) further notes that:

'all ecclesiastical sources – annals, genealogies, martyrologies, - take Patrick's association with Armagh for granted. In the tenth century the abbot of Armagh comes to be described in the Annals as the coarb of Patrick just as the abbot of Clonmacnois at the same time is given the title of coarb of Ciarán and the abbot of Emly is called coarb of Ailbe.'

In light of the probable late tenth century date of composition it is likely that a text like our poem played some role, however small, in continuing efforts

⁶ for a concise description of the Book of Armagh and its movements see O'Neill, T. (1984: 8)

⁷ see for example, Binchy, 1962, 12; Byrne, 2008; Bury, 1971: 664-5.

to consolidate Patrick's legend firmly at Armagh in order to promote Armagh,⁸ in the same vein as the main Patrician documents that preceded it.

From 965 to 1134 the abbacy of Armagh was held by the Clann Sínaich dynasty, whose succession has been described in detail by Tomás Ó Fiaich (1969). The motivation for supporting Armagh's claim to supremacy by invoking St. Patrick in verse (perhaps to engage a wider audience than the related Patrician texts) as well as in the above mentioned ecclesiastical sources must obviously be viewed in light of Armagh's contemporary political concerns. Ó Fiaich describes the realisation of Armagh's ambitions in the late tenth century as follows:

The acceptance by Dubdáleithe in 989 of the headship of the Columban churches may be looked on as a further step undertaken by him in advancing the primatial claims of Armagh and his own position as head of the Irish Church. The federation of churches founded by St. Columba and his disciples, and therefore subject to the abbot of Derry rather than to Armagh, was certainly the most important independent body of churches in the country. That it was looked on with no friendly eye by Armagh is proved by the whole tone of the *Vita Tripartita* of St. Patrick, dating in its present form from about 900, and containing accusations against the Columban rulers of exercising jurisdiction over churches which should really have belonged to the *Parochia Patricii*. By becoming head of both bodies of churches in 989 Dubdáleithe put an end, at least for the time being, to any further rivalry between the two. If Armagh's superiority had till then been asserted in theory, Dubdáleithe gave it a *defacto* primacy over all provinces and all churches.

Our poem also hints at the historical enforcement by right of Armagh's claim to tribute, again through the agency of Patrick. In addition to the explicit reference *rothecht..cert cech cóicid* (5c, d) there are references in stanzas 1 and 2 to a certain 'rule'. Both feature in chevilles that do no more than laud the 'rule' *Glaine riagla* (1b), *Rigda ind riagail* (2b). However, they may refer to *Riagail Phátraic*, the 8th Century tract which provides for episcopal supervision of pastoral obligation.⁹ Patrick's prolific establishment of churches and conferring of orders, detailed in the *Tripartite life* has been seen by Colman Etchingham (1999: 87) as 'the exercise of what the Latin canons and *Riagal Phátraic* represent as an episcopal prerogative of consecration'. What we may have in this poem, then, is both a reference to Patrick's historical establishment of churches (9c) and conferring of orders (6,7) along with a nod to the tract that authorises a continuation of the same and the collection of dues and levies by Armagh.¹⁰

⁸ Note that Ireland and Armagh are the only two places mentioned.

⁹ ed. O'Keefe (1904); for discussion see Etchingham (1999: 63-5 etc.); Kelly (2002).

¹⁰ see Etchingham (1999: 64).

In Stanza 10 Armagh is described as the cathedral chosen by Patrick, the foundation of the kingdom and the dwelling place of the perfect arks of the western world. The significance of this reference to relics may again lie in the collection of tribute. Etchingam (1999: 459-60) has described how:

In the ninth and tenth centuries there is evidence of an administrative official, the *maer*, who was apparently a legal officer and revenue gatherer and may be envisaged as a kind of sheriff. Such an official served those Columban churches which still promoted the *Cáin Adomnáin*, but the best evidence concerns Armagh's *maer* in the central eastern region of Ireland. In the later tenth century Armagh's claimed supremacy was seemingly underpinned by a series of visitations on the part of its head, which took in the main regions of the country. These were apparently tribute-gathering ventures, but also involved recognition of Armagh's legal prerogatives, and are to be related, perhaps, to the evidence for levying of *census* or *cís*.⁷

This gathering of revenue would traditionally have been an associated activity of relic-circuits,¹¹ and the possession of relics was also essential to the claiming of authority, at Armagh as in other places.¹²

As our poem does not offer any detail which is not to be found in some form in earlier Patrician documents, it rightly does not figure in the main debates surrounding them. However, at the very least, it can be described as a work which neatly praises Patrick by summarising many of his accomplishments, and reiterating the debt owed to him by the Irish in the form of a metrical *aide mémoire*, or possibly as a subtle piece of Armagh propaganda which served to remind its listeners of Armagh's claim to the saint and his legacy.

Linguistic Analysis

Augmented v Unaugmented forms

In simple verbs, unaugmented preterites increasingly give way to augmented forms in MidIr. and are well in the minority by the time of SR,¹³ Our poem preserves only one unaugmented preterite form *pritchais* (1c) compared to five augmented forms *rothecht* (5c), *co rooirdnestar* (6a); *forsroleg* (6c); *raleg* (8a); *rascribai* (9a) which are non-perfect (i.e. which do not correspond to an English 'have' perfect). Indeed, the 3sg. *s*-pret. is the most likely of all unaugmented forms to survive into MidIr.¹⁴

¹¹ see Etchingam (1999: 270); Ó Corráin (2005: 583-4)

¹² see Byrne (2005: 662).

¹³ see Breatnach, 1994: 299

¹⁴ *ibid.*: 300

In the compound verbs the augmented forms *fodaroenaig* (2a), and *doridnacht* (4a), and the suppletive form *dusfuc* (2c) are perfect in meaning, while *dosrorann* (9c) and *do-rraighai* (10a) are non-perfect.

Other significant MidIr. features in the verbal system

dusfuc (2c) has a prosthetic *f*.¹⁵

ni fuil (3c), *ni fáil* (11c) are MidIr. forms of earlier *fil*.

doridnacht (4a) has replaced OIr. *do-écomnacht*.¹⁶

co rooirdnestar (6a) is a MidIr. form showing the spread of the 3sg. deponent ending *-astar/-estar* to a verb which previously had endingless conj. forms.¹⁷

raleg (8c), *rascribai* (9a) show MidIr. *o/a* alternation in preverbs.¹⁸

rascribai (9a) shows the spread of a vocalic ending to originally endingless 3.sg. conjunct forms.¹⁹ This MidIr. form is also fixed by syllable count.

rodusaig (11a) shows MidIr. preverbal *ro* in the perf. as opposed to OIr. infixed *ro* e.g. *do-riusaig* BDD 101.²⁰

tarctait (12b); *firtait* (12c); *daltait* (12d); *foemtaitt* (12e); *samtait* (13b); *legdait* (13c) all show the innovatory MidIr. 3pl. pres. and fut. indic. ending *-tait* which developed through petrification of the 3sg. masc./neut. suffixed pron.²¹ Carney (1982: 201) suggests that at this point the poet was ‘under metrical constraint, having to find words that will rhyme and consonate with *Pátraic*. Without difficulty he finds six such.’ What these examples actually demonstrate is the flexibility within MidIr. to choose from a variety of possible endings.

¹⁵ see McCone, 1997: 200; Breatnach, 1994: 235.

¹⁶ see McCone, 1997: 189, although this is attested as early as Wb. *do:rrindnacht* Wb.20d15, id. 150). The form *doridnacht* can be found in SR 1469.

¹⁷ see McCone, 1997: 216-7; Breatnach, 1994: 300), another ex. can be found in SR *ro-oirdnistar* 5005.

¹⁸ see McCone, 1997: 169

¹⁹ see McCone, 1997; Breatnach, 1994: 300).

²⁰ cited in *DIL* sv. *do-fiuschi* (cf. SR *corondúsaig* 6690 alongside *rodasderscaig* 4423).

²¹ see Breatnach, 1977: 91-2, 106; Breatnach, 1994: 265, 296; and McCone, 1997: 174.

Hiatus

In MidIr., forms with and without hiatus occur in free variation.²² In our poem monosyllabic *dóib* (1c) and disyllabic *doib* (3a) are fixed by syllable count.

Noun

The following MidIr. developments in the nominal system are fixed by rhyme and relate mostly to the falling together of unstressed final syllables as schwa.

bliadhna (1d) (< OIr. gen. pl. *bliadnae*) in final *-a* makes perfect rhyme with *riagla*.

riagail (2b) (< OIr. *riagol/riagal*), with a later nom. sg. form in slender final consonant makes perfect rhyme with gen. sg. *diaboil* and consonates with *uaboir* and *fodaroenaig*.²³

uibe (6c) (< OIr. *oíbe*) in MidIr. fem. *iā*-stems lost their distinctive acc./dat. sg. ending in *-i* (due to the falling together of unstressed final syllables as schwa), here acc. *uibe* in final *-e* consonates with *dine* and *mile*.

lochtai (8c) (< OIr. acc. pl. *lochtu*, masc. *u*-stem in pl.) has an acc. pl. ending in *-ai*, reflecting the assimilation of the nom. & acc. pl. of *u*-stems in MidIr.²⁴ It is in rhyming position with *garta*, which shows that the *-ai* spelling is just another way of representing schwa. It also consonates with *rechta* (OIr. had *rechta/rechto*), and *sechta* (OIr. gen. sg. *sechtai*).

Macha (10d) (OIr. *Machae*) rhymes with *flatha* (historical gen. sg. form), and consonates with *bethu*.

Orthography

do hsil (4c), in MidIr. *h* is found written with no phonetic value before lenited *s* e.g. *sainhsamlai* SR 5017.²⁵

²² e.g. *ba coōir* SR 8052 as a *dúnad* on *ba coir* 8013, Breatnach, 1994: 231).

²³ c.f. Breatnach, 1997: 53, re. presence of slender final side by side with broad in Wb. & Ml.

²⁴ Breatnach, 1994: 245.

²⁵ see Breatnach, 1994: 229

Evidence of later scribal modification

gach (4c).

an (3d) for art. *in*.

in (11a) for rel. part. *a* + nas.

marking of non-historical lenition: *gradaibh* (7d), *dorraighai* (10a), *degnoibh* (13c), *Madh* (11a), *ni fhail* (11c).

Faux archaisms: *marpaib* (11a), *pa* (9c).

Further comments on the language of the text can be found in the textual notes.

Meyer's Edition

A number of Meyer's editorial decisions create difficulties of interpretation. In 12a and 13c he reads *d'egnuib* i.e. prep. *do* 'to, for' + dat. pl. of *ecna* 'wise man, philosopher', which makes little sense here, in preference to *degnuib* 'good saint'. His practice regarding the expansion of suspension strokes is inconsistent, for ms. *sac*-t he has both unmarked *sacart* (6a) and marked *sacart* (13a). In 13a he silently expands ms. *epsco*- as sg. *Epscop* whereas reading pl. *Epscoip* and pl. *sacairt* (in preference to Meyer's sg. *sacart*) allows us to take both as subject of *samtait* in 13b, which provides the only cogent interpretation of this couplet. Some of Meyer's other emendations were apparently made in order to make the text fit with his suggested OIr. date of composition. Further detailed comments on these can be found in the textual notes.

Editorial Policy

In the text below, I follow Meyer's word division and capitalization for the most part. I have supplied lenition within square brackets in lenited medial and final consonants where it would normally be expected in OIr./MidIr. I have not supplied nasalization or lenition where it may be deemed to be absent i.e. where they would not have been regularly marked (e.g. 1c *cen cóemna*). Non-historical marking of lenition, as detailed in the linguistic analysis, has been rectified. I have used italics to mark the expansion of all suspension strokes, other compendia such as superscript *ra*, *ar*, *air*, *us*, *co/con* etc. are not marked in transcription. Length marks have been used in preference to Meyer's macrons, and some additional length marks omitted by Meyer have been added (marks of length are virtually absent in the ms.). The presentation of diphthongs has been regularised to modern convention. I have also supplied punctuation in verbal complexes and to separate nasalising *n* from radical initials, again in some instances where they were omitted by Meyer. Apart from the limited number of

emendations detailed in the textual notes, the text otherwise represents the readings of the manuscript.

Edited Text

1. Pátraicc Macha mártai Gaídil,
glaine ríagla,
príte[h]ais dóib cen chleit[h] cen cóemna,
sé deich mblíadhna.
2. Bat[h]ais Pátraic fo-da:róenaig,
rígda ind ríagail,
du-s:fuc Pátraic cen ail n-úaboir,
a taig Díaboil.
3. Doib bas brit[h]em dia brátha,
bret[h] as doidngiu,
ní fuil nóeb co:ní a airde,
co:tí in Coimde.
4. Coimdiu feisin do:ridnacht dou,
fonn ar feraind,
is leis fír cach Goídil glanuill,
do hsíl Breguinn.
5. Bráthir dún ardabstail Érenn,
ind noíb nóitir,
ro:thecht seoccu mac mec Fotaid,
cert cech cóicid.
6. Co-ro:oirdnestar slúag sacart,
sruith in díne,
lín fors:rolég grád co n-uíbe,
téora míle.
7. Mad in slúag ardepscop n-úasal,
úaisle dánaib,
secht cóicait n-epscoep n-úag n-óebin,
úad fo grádaib.

8. Grían gel Gaídel, glére garta,
réle ar rec[h]ta,
lér ra:lég cen luithe lochtaí,
suinte sechta.
9. Secht cét aipgitrech ra:scribai,
screptra scríbenn,
secht cét celd ba cáin do-s:rorann,
do maíl írenn.
10. Arde[h]ell do:rraígai dó feisin,
fonn na flatha,
adba n-árcc n-óg iarthair bethu,
Ard mór Macha.
11. Mad an-ro:dúsaig do marbaib,
is mó mílib,
ní fail cenn co:ní a árim,
is drem dírim.
12. Degnuib íart[h]air dúisig domuin,
is dó tártait,
do lou bráthai cech fis firtait,
is fris dáltait,
is é a flaith firda fóemtaitt
prím da Pátraic.
13. Epscoip Hérenn ocus sacairt,
sruithe sámtaít,
degnóib Érenn is ed légdait,
légenn Pátraic. Pátraic.

Translation

1. Patrick of Armagh whom the Gaels exhalt, purity of the rule, he preached to them without shelter or protection, for sixty years.
2. It is Patrick's baptism which has cleansed them, kingly the rule, Patrick brought them without proud reproaching, out of the Devil's house.
3. To them he will be judge on the day of Judgement, a judgement most difficult, no saint is as exalted as he, until the Lord comes.

4. The Lord Himself has bestowed upon him, the soil of our land, he has the pledge of every great pure Gael, of the race of Bregan.
5. The high apostle of Ireland is our brother, the saints are celebrated, the son of the son of Fotad had a claim in preference to them, to the tribute of every province.
6. He ordained a host of priests, elders of the race, Great the number upon whom he conferred orders beautifully, three thousand.
7. As for the host of noble archbishops, most honourable of professions, three hundred and fifty pure, gracious bishops, in holy orders from him.
8. Shining sun of the Gaels, abundance of generosity, the glory of our law, carefully he read without stammering faults, the knowledge of the seven.
9. Seven hundred alphabets he wrote down, scriptural writing, seven hundred churches, beautifully he marked them out, for the devoted of the land.
10. He chose a cathedral for himself, the foundation of the kingdom, abode of the perfect arks of the western world, great Armagh.
11. As for the spiritually dead whom he resuscitated, they are more than a thousand, there is no chief who might enumerate them, it is an innumerable company.
12. The good saint of the bountiful western world, it is to him they make their offerings, on the day of Judgement they realise all knowledge, it is with him they meet, he is their just lord whom they accept, pre-eminent Patrick.
13. The bishops and priests of Ireland calm the elders, the good saint of Ireland that is what they study, the writings of Patrick.

Textual Notes

1a: The presence here of the largely obsolete OIr. 3pl. pres. ind. rel. ending *-t(a)e*, which has various spellings in MidIr. e.g. *martai* here, is due to its survival into MidIr. as a purely literary form (see McCone, 1997: 183). Special relative forms are scarce in SR, all but one of the examples occur in chevilles (see Breatnach, 1994: 296-7).

1c: In order to explicitly restore hiatus in *doib*, which he has marked with an umlaut, and thereby ensure conformity with his suggested OIr. date of

composition, Meyer removed the second ms. *cen* to retain a syllable count of 8. I suggest leaving the ms. reading as is i.e. monosyllabic. The ex. at 3a, however, clearly does preserve hiatus. In Mid.Ir., hiatus is lost or forms with and without hiatus occur in free variation e.g. *ba coöir* SR 8052 as a *dúnad* on *ba coir* 8013 (Breatnach, 1994: 231). In spite of the example above, Meyer comments in the introduction to his edition of the poem beginning ‘*Is mebul dom imrādud*’ (1907: 13), which he ascribes to the tenth century, that ‘Cóir ‘just’ counts as a monosyllable (2), as in *Saltair na Rann* (except in 1.1102: *rodelb cech coir comláin*), while it is always disyllabic (*coair*) in *Féilire Óingusso*’ thereby suggesting that the example in 1.1102 is the only case of *cóir* with hiatus in *Saltair na Rann* and furthermore, seemingly, that one should view absence of hiatus as a feature of Mid.Ir. texts like *Saltair na Rann* and hiatus forms as a feature of Old Irish texts like *Féilire Óingusso*. This, along with his unqualified belief that our poem is an Old Irish composition, helps explain his unwillingness to allow a monosyllabic form *dóib* (1c) to exist alongside a disyllabic form *doib* (3a).

2a: The use in *fodaroenaig* of a Class C infixed pron with a rel. verbal form does conform to OIr. usage; however, other examples can be found in SR (see Breatnach, 1994: 267).

3d: Meyer restored in *Coimdiu* for ms. *an coimde*, the emendation to the article should of course stand, the emendation to *Coimdiu*, however, was made in order to (a) restore its OIr. form, and (b) ensure perfect rhyme with *doidngiu* (3b). As a result of the falling together in Mid.Ir. of final unstressed syllables, *doidngiu* and *Coimde* still make a rhyming pair (although imperfect as /ng/ and /d/ do not agree in class), and therefore the ms. reading *coimde* should remain unchanged.

4a: Meyer switched ms. *doridnacht dou* for *dou doridnacht*. His reasons for making this emendation were probably stylistic even though *doridnacht* at the end of the line does not contribute to the metre in any way.

4c: I have restored *cach* in place of ms. *gach*, which is due to later scribal modification.

5a: Meyer emended ms. *brathir* to *Bratir*, which *DIL* s.v. *braithid* ‘espies, spies etc.’ translates as ‘let us observe the high apostles?’ This interpretation makes no sense, given the clearly preferable and meaningful alternative reading of the manuscript itself.

5b: The ms. has *roitir*, a form which resists analysis and offers no sense of what the subject of this passive construction, *ind noib*, are undergoing. Prof. Ruairí Ó hUiginn made the very helpful suggestion to me of emending to *nóitir*, i.e. 3.pl. pres. pass. of *nóid* ‘makes known, celebrates’, which would fit well in the context and allow us to view the manuscript reading as a relatively minor error of transmission. That *nóitir* was the original form is all the more obvious as it restores alliteration in this line.

5c: In *rothecht* the lenited *t* here could signify a proleptic infixed pron. anticipating the object *cert* (5d) with the preverb showing *o/a* alternation

(see McCone, 1997: 169), or it may simply be due to MidIr. main clause lenition (*ibid.*: 173-4). Meyer emends ms. *seoccu* to *seochu*, i.e. ignoring the later *-eo-* which could represent either a scribal innovation or the spread of the MidIr. phonological development of *e > eo* in stressed syllables before *ch*/lenited *g*, to this unstressed form.

6a: *DIL* lists three separate verbs with similar meaning *oirdnid/ordnaid* (fr. Lat. *ordinare*), *oirdnigid* and *ord(d)aigid(ir)* (denom. from *ord*). The expected pret. form of the last of these is attested in Wb. *na cumactte is Dia rod-ordigestar* 6a3. *Oirdnid/ordnaid* had a suffixless pret. historically, e.g. *ru-da-nordan* Wb.33c5. The present ex. belongs to *oirdnid* and shows the spread of the 3sg. deponent ending *-astar/-estar* to verbs which previously had endingless conj. forms (see McCone, 1997: 216-7; Breatnach, 1994: 300), another ex. can be found in SR *ro-oirdnistar* 5005.

6c: the context would suggest taking *forsroleg* as a form of *léicid*.

7a: The ms. has *Mad* in sluag *nardepscop nuasal*, the nasalisation on *ardepscop* would not be expected here and can only be due to scribal error. I have, therefore, removed it.

7b: Meyer emends ms. *uaisle* to *uaisliu*, as it is not in rhyming position we cannot be sure of the historical value of the final vowel; however, if the poem is a MidIr. composition, which appears to be the case, the ms. reading would require no emendation. Regardless of the spelling of the final vowel, its form is that of the OIr. comparative used with the sense of the superlative. Although this development begins in OIr. (see *GOI*: 232) it becomes more common in MidIr. e.g. *Lucifer léom as dúru (:cúlu)* SR 8322 (Breatnach, 1994: 257). The object is in the dative as one would expect.

9a: Meyer rightly restores the earlier spelling *aipgitrech* in place of ms. *aipgitriocho* (exactly what these ‘alphabets’ are has not been definitively established; for a discussion of the question see Márkus, 1996).

9b: *DIL* has two conflicting interpretations of *screptra scribenn*, the first s.v. *scribend* takes it as an example ‘(b) of holy writ: ...screptra scribenn arch. iii. 303 § 9’ whereas the second s.v. *scriptuir* cites it as an example of ‘(b) of non-biblical writings: secht cēt aipgitrech rascríbai | screptra scribenn (Patrick)’.

9c: I have restored the non-archaised spelling *ba* for ms. *pa*.

10a: *do-rraighai* is a MidIr. form replacing earlier *do-roígu* (eg. Wb. 4b31), in SR it appears as *doraiga* 2785, 3377 etc.

10c: Meyer restored *betho* for ms. *bethu*; however, in MidIr. *bethu* could also represent the gen.sg., and in rhyming position here it makes perfect consonance with *flatha* and *macha*, (in OIr. consonance requires that vowels be of the same quantity and final vowels identical, this becomes irrelevant in MidIr.).

11a: I have restored the earlier spelling *a* in the relative particle for ms. *inro* and *marbaib* for the manuscript’s archaised spelling *marpaib*.

11d: Meyer has supplied a macron in the first syllable in *dirim*, but deliberately omitted one in the second syllable so as not to upset the metre.

12a: *DIL* s.v. *do-fairget* questions Meyer's reading *d'egnuib*, but accepts it s.v. *duisech*. *DIL* s.v. *do-fairget* cites the present example *tarctait* but places a question mark before it, seemingly questioning whether or not this is a 3pl. form. Given what we know of the development of this ending and the reasonable number of examples we have demonstrating its use, the question mark is no longer necessary.

12c: *DIL* s.v. *fraid* cites the present ex. with the analysis '3pl. pres.+ pron. suff.' while this accounts for the *-tait* ending, it is potentially misleading as the suff. pron. has no force, and *-tait* is simply an alternative 3pl. pres./fut. ind. ending. This is also the case with *foemtaitt* (12c) which *DIL* cites s.v. *fo-eim* '(With suff.)'.

12e: see note on 12c above re. the *-tait* ending in *foemtaitt*.

12f: I have omitted the superfluous *dúnad Patraic* (see footnote 17).

13b: *DIL* s.v. *sámaid* cites the present ex. *samtait* as one of only two examples supporting the meaning 'calms, soothes' (denom. of *sám*), preceded, however, by a question mark.

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